

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and Members of the Education Committee,

AFT Connecticut, a statewide labor union representing more than 12,000 teachers, is concerned about two provisions in H.B. 5491, An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut,

- **Section 1** would allow parents to recommend reconstitution of a failing school via petition. Known as the "parent trigger", this provision would not solve the challenge we face in many urban school districts – how to engage parents in their children's education. We all know that parents who are engaged in their child's education play an important role in how a student succeeds and how a school improves. Research has shown that family involvement improves not only a child's academic achievement, but also their attendance, behavior and physical well-being. Teachers want open dialogue with parents and their active participation, but we are concerned that a parent trigger is a single action that may split school communities and pit key constituencies against each other. California enacted the first-ever parent trigger earlier this year as part of its Race to the Top application. To date, it has not been implemented, so we don't have any idea if it will positively encourage parents to be more active in a substantive way. In addition, the parent trigger did not help California in its efforts to secure Race to the Top funds. The state was not named as a grant finalist.

There are many successful models that effectively engage parents throughout a student's academic career. In Connecticut, AFT and other education advocates worked to launch the CommPACT school model which has a strong parent component. Parents must overwhelmingly support designating a school as a CommPACT school and share responsibility with teachers, administrators, superintendents and community leaders in charting the school's turnaround. Eight schools in Connecticut's urban centers are now in their first implementation year and we are already seeing significant results, especially in increased parental participation.

We would support language that would get to the root of the issue, rather than employ one-shot actions. Such language may require districts to review and update their local parent plans and require parents to be part of that process. We also support professional development for teachers and administrators on how best to engage parents and how to address cultural and/or language differences that may exist. We should also consider making this part of the curriculum in our teacher preparation and alternative route to certification programs.

- **Section 3 (c)** would require teacher evaluations to include student academic growth as a significant factor in evaluating teacher performance. AFT has already agreed, by signing Connecticut's Race to the Top application, that student achievement should be included in teacher evaluation, provided multiple measures, rather than just standardized test scores, are used. We are concerned about subsection (d). This would require the State Board of Education's teacher evaluation model (provided to districts to aid them in the development of their own frameworks) to weight student academic growth at at least 50% of a teacher's evaluation. This is prescriptive and does not reflect the diversity of needs and issues faced by Connecticut's school districts and students. Many factors of student performance are beyond a teacher's control.

AFT supports language that would give teachers an equal voice in developing teacher evaluation programs, as was done in the recently acclaimed New Haven agreement. Most teachers don't feel their current evaluations represent their experiences and challenges in the classroom. In addition, administrators do not always have the time, resources or the skills, needed to properly evaluate their performance. When teachers have input on how they will be measured, there is instant buy-in and support for the system. Collaborative discussion is also more likely to lead to an equally important topic – how to help teachers who need improvement.

Thank you for your consideration,

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